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ABSTRACT

An educational experiment concerning second language acquisition is described in this report. It is hypothesized that low ethnocentrism, positive attitudes toward the other group, and an integrative orientation toward language comprise high motivation, with the opposite criteria controlling low motivation. Puerto Rican children involved in the experiment completed attitudinal questionnaires concerning American culture. The questionnaire covered these areas: (1) plans for residence in the United States, (2) attitudes toward Americans, (3) expectations, (4) goals for children, (5) language, (6) social distance, and (7) political party affiliations. (RL)

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THE INFLUENCE OF A SOCIAL SETTING ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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May 15, 1970

FL 003 508

I. Rationale

The search for ways to facilitate language learning has been confined to the domain of language. Learning a foreign language is usually seen as the process of acquiring the linguistic habits of another group. Much of the research on teaching a foreign language has concentrated on analyses of a group's linguistic conventions, methods to teach those conventions, and theories of learning and language aptitude.

If a particular language is seen as one of the distinguishing marks of a social group, then favorable attitudes toward that group should facilitate the acquisition of language.[1] Extensive studies conducted mainly by Wallace Lambert and Robert Gardner at McGill University [2] investigated the notion that motivation is sufficient to insure mastery of a new language.

The requisite motivation, according to Lambert, is controlled by "the learner's ethnocentric tendencies, his attitudes towards the other group, and his orientation toward language."[3] Language orientation may be either: 1). instrumental, e.g., to further one's job status, to be able to communicate with doctors and salesmen, etc.; or 2). integrative, i.e., to be able to participate in the social/cultural life of the other group. Low ethnocentrism, positive attitudes towards the other group, and an integrative orientation toward language comprise high motivation, with the opposite criteria controlling low motivation.

A series of studies to test this hypothesis were conducted on 75 students of the Montreal English community who had studied French for at least six years. Variables included were: 1). proficiency in French measured by teacher's evaluations plus nine objective tests of specific French skills, 2). language aptitude measured by three subtests from the Modern Language Aptitude Test, 3). language motivation measured by scales of orientation, desire and motivational intensity, 4). social attitudes measured by scales for ethnocentrism, general attitude, attitude towards French and English Canadians, anomie and authoritarianism, 5). miscellaneous variables, e.g., sex, attitudes towards child rearing, parents and self. Intercorrelations of these variables were factor analyzed.

Similar studies were conducted on high school students in the French community of Louisiana (who regard French culture as inferior to American), and in Maine (who value French culture highly), and in a typical American community in Hartford, Connecticut. Among the many findings from these studies, only the most relevant to our own investigation are cited here.

Language aptitude and motivation, as defined, correlated highly with success in language learning. Holding aptitude constant, English Canadians who had favorable attitudes towards French Canadians were more proficient in French skills than those who had negative attitudes. The Franco Americans in Maine were superior in French to those in Louisiana. In spite of their social contact with the French language, the Louisiana students generally performed no better, and sometimes more poorly, than the Hartford students who had no social contact

with French-speaking people.

In other words, aptitude and motivation were found to be independent, i.e., they were not correlated with each other, though each taken separately correlated with language proficiency. Also, aptitude was correlated with "classroom skills" (aural and written) while motivation correlated more highly with "conversational skills" (vocabulary, grammar and oral proficiency).

With the Lambert-Gardner findings as a starting point, we further hypothesized that attitudes of parents towards the other group are transmitted to their children [4] and thus should correlate with the children's proficiency in the other language. Lambert and Klineberg [5] report that stereotypes acquired by children under eight years of age are either completely positive or completely negative, becoming less stark as they grow older. They observed that nursery school children are indeed aware of ethnic distinctions of majority and minority groups. We thus predicted that there might be a relation between the English proficiency of first grade Puerto Rican children and their parents' attitudes towards assimilation to American culture.

II. Method

This study was not meant to be rigorous or definitive. We designed it as a pilot study which would give some indication of the strength of our hypothesis.

The subjects of the study were ten Puerto Rican children, aged seven and eight in the bilingual first grade class at the Bancroft School in the South End, and one or both parents of each child. We worked with this particular group of children because they were the only Puerto Rican children available to us who had been in the United States at least one year and who could speak some English. Their parents are semi-skilled or unskilled workers or on welfare. Both researchers are fluent in Spanish and have had some experience teaching and associating with Puerto Rican children and adults.

The evaluation of attitudes toward assimilation was obtained from taperecorded interviews with the parents in Spanish, using a questionnaire which we designed.(See Section III below.) During the interviews the questions were often elaborated on so that the parents understood them clearly, and sometimes additional questions were asked to clarify responses.

For scoring purposes, the questions were rephrased to yield yes-no answers which indicated either a positive or negative attitude toward assimilation. Responses that indicated negative attitudes were marked 0; those that indicated positive attitudes were marked 1. The total score divided by the number of questions answered yielded a percentage score. (See Appendix A)

The children's English proficiency was determined by the English section of the English/Spanish Auditory Test for Language Comprehension for 6-8-year old children, developed by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas (1969). (See Appendix B for a list of the categories included in the test.) Children were asked to point to the one of three pictures on a page that illustrated what the tester said. Six items required the child to respond to commands.

Though the test is barely adequate as a measure of language skills, no better test for English proficiency of young non-English speaking children was available to us. ("Proficiency" is used here to mean "knowledge" of English, a discussion of which would require another paper.) The actual test is for comprehension only, not production, and includes vocabulary and traditional grammar items. A comparison of vocabulary scores and syntax scores (items labeled "morphology, grammar and syntax" in Appendix B) showed that each child performed as well on syntax as on vocabulary in relation to the other children. Therefore, in our data analysis, we used only the total score as the measure of English proficiency.

Although the adequacy of the linguistic content of the test can be questioned, there are no experimentally supported formulations of what should be included in a foreign language test for children. The confounding of cognitive skills with linguistic skills, and ambiguous pictures were the other deficiencies of the test. We therefore administered the test to two American

children, 6½ and 7½ years of age, who should have obtained perfect scores, if the test measured only language ability. On the basis of their errors, we eliminated 11 "bad" items.

Because our sample was so small, we decided to divide subjects into two categories -- high and low -- for both English proficiency and assimilation attitude. Numerical scores would be used only as a tool for placement. Since neither the English test nor the questionnaire had been standardized, we did not have a previously determined cut-off point for either variable. We thus decided that we would have to look at scores before the cut-off points could be determined.

We decided to use 2x2 contingency tables, scatter diagrams and other helpful graphs to demonstrate the strength -- or weakness -- of our hypothesis, as well as to gain insights into the nature of our sample. At this stage of investigation, statistical tests for significance would not be necessary, nor profitable, given our sample size.

III. The Questionnaire

The term "assimilation" is still surrounded by an aura of confusion, though noted sociologists have attempted to "break it down" into composite variables. Throughout this study we have loosely defined assimilation as the process by which individuals from one group acquire the sentiments, culture, language and values of another group.[6] The individual's own perception of the majority group's culture, language, and values would determine his willingness to assimilate.

For the purpose of our study, we constructed a seven-part questionnaire which we felt would reveal the subjects' attitudes toward assimilation. The parts are:

1. Plans for residence in the United States
2. Attitudes towards Americans
3. Expectations
4. Goals for children
5. Language
6. Social distance
7. Political party affiliation

The description of each section will be labeled "Part A"; "Part B" will evaluate it.

1. Plans for Residence in the U.S.A.

A. Because Puerto Rico is so geographically and financially accessible, there is a trend among Puerto Ricans to move to the mainland, work until a satisfactory amount of money is made, and then return to the island to enjoy their savings. This fact not only differentiates the Puerto Rican migration from that of other minority groups but also affects the group's willingness to assimilate. For there is less incentive to adapt oneself to new ways when there is the ever-presentoption to return to the comfort of one's homeland.

For these reasons, Questions #1 and #2 asked whether or not the family planned to remain permanently in the U.S.A. or return to Puerto Rico. Furthermore, we expected that frequent visits to Puerto Rico to visit family would also decrease one's motivation to assimilate. We did, however, ask whether they would advise remaining family members in Puerto Rico to come to live in the United States. (Question #4) We felt that an answer of "yes" would indicate a positive attitude toward the country, since one would advise a family member to come only if the move would be beneficial.

B. Of the five questions which comprised this section, only Questions #1 and #2 correlated highly with the total assimilation score and,in fact, reinforced each other. Appendix C shows that those who scored lowest on total assimilation answered "no" to Question#1 and subsequently "yes" to Question #2. That is to say, those parents who planned to stay in the U.S.A. permanently, scored higher on assimilation than those who planned to return to Puerto Rico.

Another interesting observation is that Question #5 - "Would you advise your relatives to come here to live?" - correlated 100% with Question #19 on Expectations - "Are you dissolutioned with life here?"

2. Attitudes towards Americans

A. A two-part objective directed the formulation of the questions in this section. First, we wanted the individual to reveal his idea of a typical American. The respondent was guided by a series of specific questions on the physical appearance, typical customs, religion, family life and economic level of the American majority group.

Second, we wanted to ascertain the degree to which the individual sensed differences between his community and that of the majority group. For example: "Do you think that there is as much mutual respect between sons and fathers in the American family as in Puerto Rican families?" We included Question #15 - "Do you yourself feel different from an American?" which we felt would indicate whether these differences were interfering with the individual's own move toward assimilation.

B. The scores of this section showed a range similar to that of the total scores. Those who had been ranked low on total assimilation also got the lowest percentages on attitudes toward Americans. Particularly interesting was the consistency of "yes" answers to questions such as numbers 8, 9, 10, 14, 15, which indicate that the individuals who had a negative attitude toward assimilation also sensed the greatest degree of differences between themselves and the majority group.

Although differences such as food, dress, life style (the majority felt that Americans were "encerrado" - cold - and valued privacy) were mentioned, the language barrier was cited by everyone as the principal difference. Our ob-

servations seemed to show that this section was a good indicator of assimilative attitudes.

3. Expectations

A. We were concerned here with ascertaining what the subject had thought about Americans and American life while still in Puerto Rico and how this image had changed since his arrival. We felt that if a person's previous notions of a situation proved to be overly optimistic, he would become frustrated and critical of the country or people who had failed to meet his expectations. The disillusionment would thus produce a negative attitude toward assimilation.

B. The responses to Question # 18 and # 19 indicate that the section on expectations was not adequate. The majority stated that their expectations about American life had been accurate and that they were not disillusioned with life here. The fact that some of those who expressed this opinion also planned to return to Puerto Rico indicates that there were other factors operating which the questionnaire did not investigate.

4. Goals for Children

A. Since enrollment in an educational system would put a Puerto Rican child into close social and linguistic contact with members of the majority group, we felt that parental desire to have children continue their education here would reflect a positive attitude towards assimilation. However, the parent's desire that his child receive a U.S. education might reflect only a dissatisfaction with the Puerto Rican educational system rather than an assimilative attitude. Therefore, Question #21, which asked whether the parent wanted his child to return to Puerto Rico to live, was included to clarify his position.

B. The subjects expressed little or no strong feelings about their children's career plans. Most felt that the child's intellectual ability would determine the limits of his progress in the educational system, and consequently, his career.

5. Language

A. According to Robert E. Park, an American sociologist,

> "an immigrant is ordinarily considered assimilated as soon as he has acquired the language and the social ritual of the native community and can participate, without encountering prejudice, in the common life, economic and political."[7]

Our assessment of orientation towards English included two factors: 1). the individual's exposure to spoken English while still in Puerto Rico, 2). present attitude towards English learning both for self and for children, including their reasons for wanting to learn English. As Lambert suggests, an integrative orientation towards language would correlate more highly with assimilation than an instrumental one.[8]

B. Upon anlysis, we found that this section yielded nothing conclusive. We observed no relation between a high total assimilation score and either prior exposure of the parent to spoken English while in Puerto Rico or his ability to speak English. (Questions #22,#22a) Futhermore, all parents expressed a willingness to attend adult education classes.(Question#23)

We had anticipated that all parents would want their children to learn English. However, following Lambert, we expected that an integrative orientation towards language learning would correlate more highly with a positive attitude toward assimilation. This was not borne out by our findings.

Nine out of the ten parents interviewed expressed an instrumental orientation toward language learning. The tenth also mentioned it in addition to integrative reasons. Seven parents were ranked as "high" in the total assimilation score.

Lambert studied middle-class students; our sample were all from the lower, semi-skilled working class. It seems reasonable that a group who had migrated primarily to find better jobs would not only have a distinct instrumental orientation but also would be acutely aware of the advantages of speaking English in the job market both here and in Puerto Rico.

6. Social Distance

A. A major factor in the process of assimilation is the formation of social structural relationships,[9] which generally are divided into three major levels:

1. occupational-educational contacts
2. friendship-neighborhood contacts
3. intimate family circle contacts

This section investigated the willingness of the subject to associate with Americans on each of these levels.

We felt that although positive social contacts in levels #1 and#2 would facilitate assimilation, a positive response to social contacts with Americans in the intimate family circle would be the best assimilation indicator. However, if the ordering of the levels did not hold true for the Puerto Rican community, the greatest number of "yes" responses would indicate an assimilative attitude.

B. The responses to the social distance section were not related to the total assimilation score. Moreover, the anticipated ordering of levels did not hold true for our sample. For example, in Question#29, only one of the nine subjects who answered expressed a preference for Puerto Ricans as marriage partners for their children whereas in Question #28, two out of ten subjects resented Americans living in their neighborhoods.

Although the small difference might no even warrant mention, the subjects' receptivity to marriage with Americans might be explained by their past history of intermarriage with a variety

of different ethnic and racial groups. Furthermore, this might possibly prove to be a positive factor in their move towards upward mobility.

7. Political Party Affiliation

A. The three political parties in Puerto Rico are: the Estadistas who advocate making Puerto Rico a state, the Independentistas who advocate independence for Puerto Rico, and the Populares who advocate keeping the current commonwealth status of Puerto Rico. We predicted that the Estadistas would want to assimilate, the Independentistas would not, and the Populares would fall somewhere along an assimilation continuum.

B. Since only one individual in our sample belonged to the Independistas, we were unable to infer anything from this section. For what it's worth, the Independista scored lowest on the assimilation total.

IV. Findings

Table 1 below lists the English proficiency and Assimilation scores recorded for the children and their parents. The determination

TABLE 1

	English Proficiency		Assimilation	
High	93		85	
	88		81	
	83		76	
	78		75	
	76		71	High
	75		69	
	71		66	
	70			
			51	
Low	59		43	
	54		32	Low
$\bar{X}$ =	70.7		64.6	
median =	75.5		70.0	

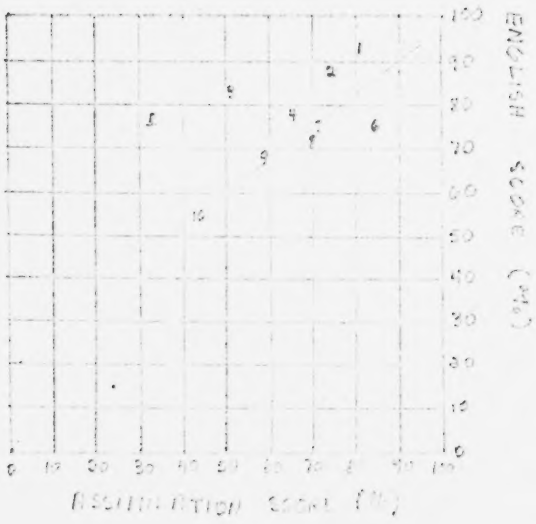
of cut-off points to form categories is an arbitrary and difficult task, especially in a sample of such small size. The median or mean of each range did not seem a reasonable dividing line, since at that borderline, the difference between a high and low scorer was only one or two points. We decided to make the division at a point where there was a "large" difference between scores. Though these categories yielded only two low English performers and three low assimilation scores, they provide the best description of our sample. A contingency table and scatter diagram follow below and on the next page. The numbers refer to each subject, who are ranked in descending order of English proficiency.

The 2 by 2 contingency table, though not indicating a strong correlation between assimilation and proficiency, does not disprove the hypo-

Figure 1

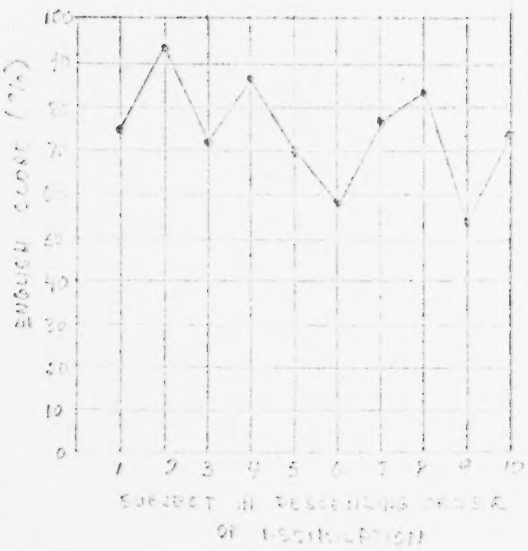
ASSIMILATION \ ENGLISH PROFICIENCY	HIGH	LOW	
HIGH	1, 2, 4 6, 7, 8	9	7
LOW	3, 5	10	3
	8	2	10

Figure 2



SCATTER DIAGRAM

Figure 3



-thesis. Of eight subjects scoring high in proficiency, six also scored highly in assimilation attitudes of parents. Of the seven in the high category of assimilation, six were in the high proficiency group. The scatter diagram of the numerical scores indicates that correlation may exist between the two variables. With a larger sample, regression analysis might show a significant relationship between proficiency and assimilation attitudes, if the additional data were of a similar character to the small sample examined here. Figure 3 also shows that English scores tend to decrease with a decrease in assimilation scores.

To provide a further insight into the data, we decided to look at the length of time the child had spent in the United States in relation to his English proficiency; the duration of contact with English could be also an important factor in proficiency and would affect our conclusions as a result. Table 3 shows the distribution of the students with respect to length of residence, and presents another contingency table for these new factors.

Table 3

	# of years in U.S.	# Of Students-Proficiency Ranking
Low	1	3 (#4,8,10)
	2	1 (#6)
	2.5	2 (#7,9)
High	4	1 (#3)
	7	2 (#1,2)
	8	1 (#5)

Table 2

		English Proficiency: High	English Proficiency: Low
Time	High	#1,2,3,5	
	Low	#4,6,7,8	# 3, 10

Table 3 does show a tendency for those children who were in the U.S. a long time relative to the others to have a greater English proficiency; however, this relationship is not a simple linear one and it is hard to judge this factor's importance relative to assimilation attitudes.

The rate with which a child can learn a second language has not been thoroughly studied as far as we know. It seems to be a function of many factors, including aptitude, cultural contact, and motivation. Therefore, the assimilation-proficiency hypothesis presented in this paper must be considered in light of these other factors, which may prevent the revelation of a simple relationship in any sample. The time factor discussed above may be one of these important 'other' factors complicating the study. Another possibility, previous school experience, after examination was considered not to be significant. In any future study, these and other potential influences on language proficiency should be included for analysis. Certainly this paper has shown that assimilation attitudes should be seriously considered in any such study.

V. Conclusion

The results of this pilot study, though by no means conclusive, did not contradict our hypothesis; indeed they suggest that a more rigorous testing of the hypothesis would be profitable. We recognize the deficiencies in our design and the limitations of our sample. However, the study provides some guidelines for further validation of the questionnaire and emphasizes the need for the development of an adequate test of children's language proficiency.

Many of the parents interviewed saw language as the most important difference between Americans and Puerto Ricans. They all recognized the value of being fluent in English and felt strongly that their children should learn to speak English as quickly as possible. If further investigation into the effects of social attitudes on children's language learning yields significant correlations, then we would gain yet another tool for improving ESL programs in the schools.

The task of teaching English to Puerto Rican children has fallen to the schools who have accepted the responsibility. However, the implication that school curriculum should be directed towards shaping an ethnic group's attitudes towards assimilation into American culture is an ethical matter which should be thoroughly examined before being implemented. The knowledge of attitudinal effects on language learning would surely aid in the evaluation of the success or failure of students in ESL programs. Also, if the teacher looked into parents' attitudes, she could understand better her pupils'

performance in class. She might also spend more time on presenting to her pupils those aspects of American life that would appeal to Puerto Ricans.

A less controversial application of the theory would be the development of bilingual education programs that included American pupils learning Spanish. It would be a strong indication to the Puerto Rican community that Americans are interested in their culture. The Puerto Ricans would surely respond favorably.

APPENDIX A

REPHRASED QUESTIONNAIRE FOR SCORING

QUESTION - RESIDENCE PLANS	Scoring No	Yes
1) Do you plan to stay in the U.S. permanently?	0	1
2) Do you plan to go back to live in P.R. in the next 3 years?	1	0
3) Have you visited P.R. since you arrived or do you want/plan to soon?	1	0
4) Do you have close relatives in P.R? (immediate family ?)	1	0
5) Would you advise them to come here to live?	0	1
ATTITUDES TOWARD AMERICANS		
If someone who had never been to the U.S. asked you to describe an American, what would you say?		
6) Physical difference?	1	0
7) American is taller?	0	1
Social Customs		
8) Americans amuse themselves differently	1	0
9) Americans basic style of life is different	1	0
10) Young people's dating habits are different	1	0
Religion		
11) The same as Puerto Rican's?	0	1
11a) Is this important?	0	1
Family life		
12) Do children and parents respect each other?	0	1
13) Are they as close to each other as in Puerto Rico?	0	1
14) Do you think Americans and Puerto Ricans are very different?	1	0
15) Do you feel very different from an American?	1	0

QUESTION	Scoring No	Yes
16) If you stay her a long time, do think you would become more American?	0	1
16a) Do you think Americans like Puerto Ricans?	0	1
17) Do your children play with American children?	1	0
17a) Do American children influence the behaviour of your children negatively?	1	0
Expectations		
18) Have your ideas of what Americans are like changed for the worse from what they were in Puerto Rico?	1	0
19) Are you disappointed with life here?	1	0
GOALS FOR CHILDREN		
20) Do you want your children to go to high school or the university in this country?	0	1
21) Do you want them to go back to P.R. to live and work?	1	0
Language		
22) Did you hear English in P.R.?	0	1
23) If there were an English class for adults near here, would you attend? (or have you attended already?)	0	1
24) Do you think it's a good idea for your children to learn English? Why?	0	1
Social Distance		
25) Would you or your husband mind working for or with Americans?	1	0
26) Would you prefer that your children attend a school just for Puerto Ricans?	1	0
28) Do/would you mind Americans living in your neighborhood?	1	0
27) Do you have American friends? Would you like them?	0	1

QUESTION	Scoring No	Yes
29) Would you prefer that your children marry Puerto Ricans?	1	0
Political Party Affiliation		
30) Did you belong to Estadistas/Populares?	0	1
31) Do you agree with the philosophy of Independentistas?	1	0

APPENDIX B

SOUTHWEST EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT LABORATORY

Division of Research & Evaluation

AUDITORY TEST FOR LANGUAGE COMPREHENSION

(English or Spanish)

Elizabeth Carrow, Ph.D.
June 1969

VOCABULARY Subscore - 42 Items (1 - 42)

Nouns 1 - 28
Adjectives 29 - 36
Verbs 37 - 42

MORPHOLOGY Subscore - 8 Items (43 - 50)

Noun/Noun; Verb/Verb; Adjective/Adjective + Derivational Suffix "er"; also, Noun/Noun + Derivational Suffix "ist" 43 - 50

GRAMMAR Subscore - 53 Items (51 - 103)

Noun (Number) 51 - 56
Pronouns 57 - 58
  Gender and number 59 - 63
Adjectives 64 - 76
  Noun phrase w/2 adjective modifiers 77 - 78
Verbs
  Tense 79 - 86
  Status 87 - 90
  Voice 91 - 94
Adverb 95
Prepositions 96 - 101
Interrogatives 102 - 103

SYNTAX Subscore - (For 3, 4, & 5 year levels - 3 Items (104 - 106))
(For 6 & 7 year levels - 9 Items (104 - 112))

Noun-Verb, Number Agreement 104 - 105
Direct/Indirect Object 106

Performance

Simple Imperative Sentence 107 - 108
Direct/Indirect Object 109
Complex sentence w/Independent clause & dependent adjectival clause 110
Compound imperative sentence 111
Complex imperative sentence w/conditional clause 112 & 114
Compound imperative sentence using either/or 113

Comprehension

Simple imperative sentence 107 - 108
Complex sentence w/dependent adjectival clause 109
Complex imperative sentence w/conditional clause 110
Compound imperative sentence 111
Compound imperative sentence using either/or 112

APPENDIX C

DATA SHEET

Subject	English Total %	" Vocabulary %	Syntax %	Assimilation Total %	Residence %	Attitudes %	Expectations & Goals %	Language	Social Distance %	Political Party	Length of Time in USA (child) (years)	Education (child)	Place of Education	Age
1	93	98	88	81	80	70	100	Int	100		7	1	US	7
2	88	100	78	75	80	60	100		100		7	Head Start	US	7
3	83	98	72	51	80	20	75		40		4	K	US	7
4	78	95	85	66	60	50	50		100		1	2	PR	8
5	76	95	62	32	0	30	75		80	Ind	8	0		8
6	75	90	60	85	10	90	75		100		2	1	US	8
7	71	89	57	76	80	60	50		100		2.5	1	US	7
8	70	88	57	71	0	70	75		100		1	1	PR	7
9	59	78	45	69	80	40	100		100		2.5	0		7
10	54	68	43	43	20	40	50		40		1	1	PR	7

Footnotes

1. Gardner, 1966.
2. Ibid.; Lambert, 1969; Lambert, Gardner, Olton and Tunstall, 1968.
3. Lambert, 1969, p. 96.
4. Lambert and Klineburg, 1967.
5. Ibid.
6. Gordon, 1964, p. 62.
7. Ibid.
8. Lambert, 1969.
9. Gordon, p. 62.

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